

When in Rome; an Air Force Research Laboratory manager speaks the language of corporate culture

by Timothy Anderl, AFRL Headquarters

WRIGHT-PATTERSON AFB, OHIO — Dr. Henk Ruck, the Associate Director of Plans and Programs for Corporate Investment Strategy at AFRL, often finds himself among natives of different cultures. One of Ruck's passions, which he said he spends time, energy and money exploring is national and international travel.

"Whenever I would travel overseas, my wife would suggest that I learn a little bit of the language. I can speak a little bit of Dutch, Russian, Italian, and French. I believe that language really helps you understand the culture," said Ruck.

Walking the tight rope between different cultures and learning to speak their respective languages is something Ruck has put to use in his professional life. He has experienced diverse corporate cultures, as he started out as a research scientist, served as a chief scientist, and is currently in a managerial position relating to Air Force research. It helps that he is an occupational psychologist who has a trained eye for observing people in the workplace.

"(AFRL) is located in many geographical locations and each location has it's own way of doing business," Ruck said. "We have a civilian culture, a contractor culture and a military culture. Each of those cultures has a different view of the world and way of doing things.

"They each have different strata and abilities to do diverse kinds of work," Ruck said. "The parts of AFRL that have used these differing world views to diversify and strengthen the organization have been very successful."

Currently, he is responsible for justifying and obtaining the Air Force's science and technology budget, and developing corporate investment strategies and future budgets for the Air Force's future technology needs. Ruck recognizes that the key to being successful in his position is to consider the views of all parties involved.

"The biggest problem we have today is about our funding and our future," Ruck said. "Most of our scientists and engineers began working when the Defense budget was good, during the cold war. The budget didn't really begin to drop in 1989.

"The problem that scientists today are running into is that you don't really know that this neat stuff that you're a world expert in is something that you're going to continue to be able to do next month," Ruck said. "When you go to Congress and see the bills that the Air Force needs to pay you recognize that the relationship is give and take."

Ruck said that while he was a research scientist, managerial efforts were not something that he worried about; he was able to concentrate wholly on his research. As a manager, recognizing the importance of relieving scientists of budget worries or configuring solutions to budget concerns is one of Ruck's priorities.

As a civilian scientist with the Air Force, Ruck has been assigned to the Air Force Inspection and Safety Center, the Armstrong Lab, and the White House. The Armstrong Lab was one of the four super labs that was assimilated into the Air Force Research Laboratory. While at the White House Ruck was the Defense representative for the Interagency Learning Technology Office.

"My co-workers were the Department of Education, NASA, Department of Commerce, the Department of Energy, and Department of Labor. I was the only Defense representative there," Ruck said. "What I realized while I was there was, if you can make just a little bit of a difference in Washington, you can affect millions of people. You can make big differences in the laboratory that may have future effects."

With so many different parties involved in the evolution of the Air Force Science and Technology budget, including AFRL/XP, AFRL Commander Maj. Gen. Richard Paul, a configuration management board, the Deputy Undersecretary of Defense, Congress, etc., Ruck said he tries to build the best strategy possible to support the Air Force, the researchers, the warfighter and ultimately the economy.

Understanding all of the languages involved has proven to be one of Ruck's most valuable assets, whether he's travelling the world or developing strategies for AFRL. @